

Questioning: Lead up to by Comprehension

Nicole M. Cain

Wilmington College

Abstract

Questioning may be thought of as simply answering questions after reading a selection, but there is so much more to questioning. Students can answer questions and give much more thorough answers if they are able to comprehend what they are reading and if they can make connections between their schema and what they just learned. Making connections will allow them to understand, which will lead them to more accurate answers. Teachers can use many activities to help their students make connections and understand what they are reading. Mrs. Hope had “I wonders”, the Velcro theory, and anchor charts (Gregory & Cahill, 2010). Fischbaugh (2004) used book talks and encouraged writing down questions as the students read. We also learned that there are eight profiles in comprehension and they differ by how students answer question about what they have read (Applegate et al., 2006). All reading needs to be comprehended and comprehension allows students to answer all types of questions more thoroughly.

Schema Leads to Better Overall Comprehension

Using schema, a kindergarten teacher (Gregory & Cahill, 2010) helped her students understand that they could do what older students did. They comprehended what they read simply by connecting it to the information they already knew. As Mrs. Hope, a kindergarten teacher, brought out a children's book, *Zach's Alligator* by Shirley Mozelle (1995), the students began raising their hands wanting to talk about alligators and what they knew. The students said things like alligators swim and they bite and they can see underwater; they told Mrs. Hope what they knew about alligators before she even read the story. According to Gregory and Cahill (2010), before reading the story Mrs. Hope asked the students if they knew what schema was. The students explained that schema was "what you already know." After reading how the students reacted when Mrs. Hope brought out the book about alligators, it showed that students even at the age of 5 or 6 know more than what we give them credit for knowing.

Schema is a large part of everyone's intelligence because depending on how extensive the student's schema is will affect how much the student will know and how much the student can connect to a situation. Cunningham and Shagoury (as cited in Gregory & Cahill, 2010) stated that schema is the "stuff you have in your head, things you've eaten, people you've seen, places you've been, and when you read a book that is simply taking what you just learned and making a bridge to what you already know" (p. 515). Schema not only allows the students to comprehend, but once the students are able to comprehend they can begin to dig deeper and answer questions. According to Fischbaugh (2004), the number one question for book talk is what type of personal connections did you make to the characters? Students can read all they want but unless they can connect and comprehend they cannot do much with what they have read. The main focus of Fischbaugh's book talks were to grab the attention of the audience and make them want to read

more into the book. The more students can make connections, the more interested they will be giving them more to understand.

Making Connections Leads to Better Comprehension

A system called the “Velcro Theory” was started by Mrs. Hope as she explained to her students that it is always easier to learn a new concept if there is something else to stick it to (Gregory & Cahill, 2010). She stated that when we can make connections it is easier for us to comprehend what we are reading. If students can grasp the context of schema and learn to connect it to new things they read, not only will they be learning something new, but they will also be learning that all things connect if you think about what you have learned before. Students all the time are reading new books, however, they may not understand what they are reading because they don’t take the time to think about it, they rush through so they can say they’re done or so they can be the first to be done. Often it is on the teacher’s behalf that students rush their work, if teachers were more like Mrs. Hope and gave their students ideas of how to understand or made it clear to the students that even if you don’t know anything about horses you can make connections to what you know about other animals with four legs.

Gregory and Cahill (2010) showed us that Mrs. Hope teaches her students many different ways to make connections and how they can make different connections. The students in Mrs. Hope’s class are guided to make “text-to-self, text-to-text or text-to-world connections” (Gregory & Cahill, 2010, p. 516). Using these categories it helped the students to think aloud and to think with a more broad perspective. It also allowed them to make more connections because they are not focused in on one topic of discussion. Last but not least, to help the students make connections to their readings and to give them a different way to understand instead of seeing it the way it is given to them, Mrs. Hope had the students make “mind movies” where she read a

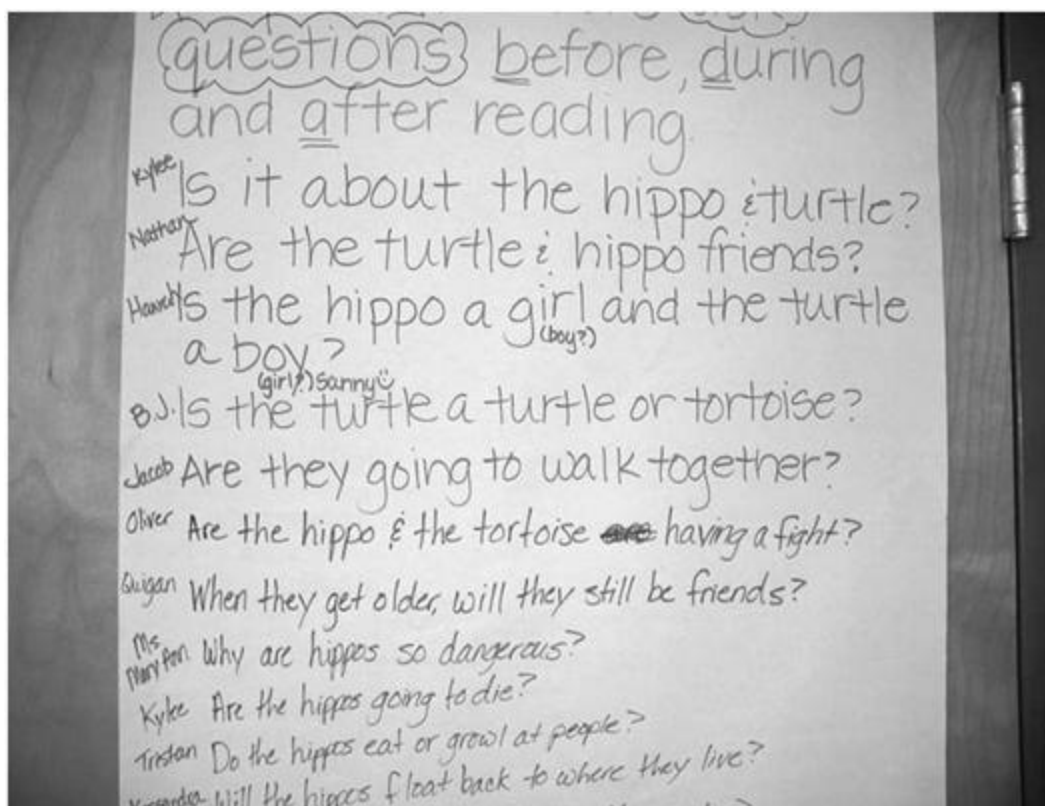
book aloud to the students and they had to create a movie or visualize what she was reading to help them better understand using their schema. Mrs. Hope gave the students many different ways to use their schema and to help them better understand new information they read, but she also helped them become more apt at comprehension.

Fischbaugh (2004), just like Mrs. Hope (Gregory & Cahill, 2010), encouraged her students to use their schema to connect to the stories they were reading. The students would complete a book talk for each book they read and they would be accountable for “putting forth and demanding knowledge that was accurate and relevant to the issue under their discussion” (Fischbaugh, 2004, p. 296). Modeled to the students were “high-level questions that focused on making personal connections and encouraged the students to give clear explanations” (Fischbaugh, 2004, p. 296). Mrs. Hope’s class only used picture books while Mrs. Fischbaugh’s class used short stories, but they both used the same idea of having their students use connections they could make to further their understanding of their readings.

Comprehension Leads to Understanding and the Creation of Thoughtful Questions

Mrs. Hope completed an activity with her students called an “anchor chart” (Gregory & Cahill, 2010). The anchor chart did not only focus on what questions the children had at the end of the story, but emphasized that “expert readers ask questions before, during and after they read” (p. 516). Mrs. Hope gave the title and then asked the children if they had any “I Wonders” which lead to their questions before the story. While she read, she stopped to encourage questions periodically in the middle of the story (Gregory & Cahill, 2010). All of the children’s questions were recorded on the chart; Mrs. Hope found that as she read the story and the more questions she stopped for, the more she found that the students’ questions became more and

more thoughtful (Gregory & Cahill, 2010). Mrs. Fischbaugh also found that the more she had her students complete book talks the more their questions showed improvement (Fischbaugh, 2004).



Anchor Charts-- Before During and After reading (Gregory & Cahill, 2010, p. 518)

“When it comes to questioning students on their comprehension of a selection, teachers tend to use a large proportion of questions that require factual recall of information” and M. Applegate, Quinn and A. Applegate (2006) found that it worked best if teachers gave their students open ended questions. These questions do not have one single response, however, the answer must be explained by the reader and they are encouraged to use more than one detail when explaining their answer (Applegate et al., 2006). We learned from Applegate et al. that there are eight learning profiles in comprehension. Each profile is based on how well students answer questions and then answer questions about their questions. This is all lead up to by comprehension because if the students don’t comprehend they cannot answer questions thoroughly. Applegate et al. stated that the eight profiles were: Literalists, Fuzzy Thinkers, Left

Fielders, Quiz Contestants, Politicians, Dodgers, Authors and Minimalists. Also found by Applegate et al. was the theory that children who explore literacy through discussion are more likely to give more thorough answers when answering questions. Almasi and Eeds & Wells stated that “they also tend to be more extensive and of higher quality and complexity and Mathewson and Ruddell & Unrau stated that they are often more interested in reading and more highly motivated to read. (as cited in Applegate et al., 2006).

New and Improved Ideas for Comprehension in Young Students

Gregory and Cahill (2010), Fischbaugh (2004) and Applegate et al. (2006) gave teachers and upcoming teachers many new and interesting ideas to use in their classroom with their research on Mrs. Hope by Gregory and Cahill (2010) and research found by Fischbaugh (2004) and by Applegate et al. (2006). Teaching students to make connections at such a young age is a big step to making reading more fun and more interesting to young readers. When students can understand and comprehend what they are reading they will continue to read because they will enjoy what they are learning, however, if the student does not understand what he/she is reading chances are they will give up. Students will also be likely to give up if they cannot comprehend because they will not be able to answer questions they are given or even their own questions they come up with while reading. Showing students that reading is informative even when you are reading for school, gives students the drive and desire to read. As a teacher in the making, I look at Mrs. Hope’s ideas and I get filled with excitement because I can only hope that I can take these ideas into my classroom and portray them to my students. It gives the students a way to take control, yet still learn and make progress in their intellectual development. Not only will I encourage the students to use their schema, but I will also encourage them to ask questions before, during and after reading a book (Gregory & Cahill, 2010, p. 516). The more questions the

students have and the more they can do with those questions, will allow them to understand even more. Education is a time for learning, but the student's can learn in a way that benefits them and still learn the same thing their fellow classmates are learning.

References

Applegate, M. D., Quinn, K. B., and Applegate, A. J. (2006). Profiles in comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(1), 48-57.

Fischbaugh, R. (2004). Using book talks to promote high-level questioning skills. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(3), 296-299.

Gregory, A.E., and Cahill, M.A. (2010). Kindergartners can do it, too! Comprehension strategies for early readers. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(6), 515-520.